# THEIR BEST PEOPLE

By LAWRENCE DEVINE.

Linfield meant to buy the old house in that remote Mississippi county. He held the option, and Colonel Jarrett had courteously left him in charge for two weeks while he went to New Orleans to sell his tobacco. Linfield was tired of city life; he wanted a good soil for the crops he intended to plant, with hunting for his leisure hours, and enough atmosphere to make his next novel readable. Besides, his people came from the south.

Then there was the girl—a shy, wondering girl of about twenty years, who took her hounds out walking every day past Linfield's gate. Linfield had been set upon once by Tiger, and the girl's apologies opened the way for an introduction. Linfield learned that her name was Mary Gates, and that her father, the major, and three brothers, lived in the big house a mile away, among the cotton-pickers' cabins.

Once, while they were talking, one of the brothers rode by, and at the sight of him the girl turned swiftly aside, as though she had not spoken to Linfield; yet, as the man rode by Linfield could see that he half checked his horse, with a frown on his face. After that the girl only offered the least nod.

"Our best people, the Gates," said the only other neighbor that Linfield had—the man who brought the milk and provisions from the town, four miles away. "Real southern gentry, sir."

"Those brothers don't seem remarkably friendly," said the writer.

"Friendly!" echoed the other. "They haven't any friendship for strangers. Why, only last year there was a fellow down here from Nashville, staying with Colonel Jarrett. Miss Mary used to go past his gate, and a sort of flirtation sprang up. She got talked about—you know country ways. The brothers came down with guns to shoot

"What Do You Think of This, Mary?"

him up, but he got over the back fence a minute too quick for 'em. Jarrett and Gates haven't spoken since."

Evidently the Gateses were dangerous neighbors. Linfield was conscious of an increasing interest in Miss Mary. She was a type he had never met before, a primitive survival in these wilds. Next time she passed he drew her into conversation. In the midst of it hoofs were heard, and instinctively the girl darted into the shelter of a high privet hedge, leaving Linfield staring foolishly into the face of the rider as he came past.

Stolen interviews are proverbially sweet, and not many days had passed before both were conscious of their dawning love. But when Linfield hinted at an invitation to the house Mary showed every sign of terror.

"I had a friend last year," she said tremulously. "He was only—a friend—he lived here—and Jim and Bob threatened to shoot him. Some busybody saw us talking. Colonel Jarrett and father haven't spoken since. You see, we are very formal in this district. If only we were friendly with the colonel, and he could introduce you—"

The thud of fists against his door startled Linfield out of his sleep. He struck a match and lit his oil lamp. The blows were redoubled. Outside were threatening voices.

Linfield opened the door. A rush of men bore him to the ground. In a trice he was bound, limp and helpless, and staring up into the faces of the Gates men.

"Get his clothes on, Bob," said one of them.

Ten minutes later, having been unbound and dressed, Linfield was conducted at pistol point into the road, where, fastened to a horse's bridle, he was made to jog over the ruts and stones until the Gates house was reached. The captors led him into the huge hall.

There stood Mary and an old man with a long beard, whom Linfield guessed to be her father. And a little apart, with downcast eyes and clasped hands, stood a man in clerical costume.

"We've got him, dad," said one of the men.

The old man turned to Linfield, and his hands shook with passion as he spoke.

"We've caught you this time, you infernal scoundrel," he shouted. "Thought you'd eluded us last year, didn't you? In these parts, when a man gets a woman talked about—"

"Father," cried Mary in agonized tones, "I tell you this isn't—"

"Silence!" roared the old man. "When he gets her talked about he dies like the dog he is or—"

"Marries her!" yelled the young men in chorus.

"Make your choice and make it quick!" said Major Gates.

Linfield lifted his eyes toward the blushing girl. If they had said hell or heaven he would have felt much as he did then. "I'll marry her," he said.

"Parson, you may proceed," said the major to the clergyman.

Five minutes later he gripped Linfield's hand between his own.

"My boy," he said, "family relationships are hard things to come by sometimes, but, once made, we hold to them in this part of the country."

There were tears in his eyes as he clasped his daughter in his arms.

"What do you think of this, Mary?" asked her husband, reading the above.

"I think it's the stupidest story I've ever read,' answered Linfield's wife. "And you've actually used our names."

"I have to, dear, according to the rules of the competition," replied her husband.

"Competition, my dear?"

"Yes. The 'Ladies' Fireside Companion' is offering 20 prizes of a thousand dollars apiece, you know, for the best description of 'How I Met My Wife.' Don't you think this ought to have a chance?"

"Well," said his wife thoughtfully, "it's got sentiment, and it's got atmosphere. But don't you think it is a little improbable?"

"Not so improbable as the truth," answered Linfield. "Fancy, in a whole world full of people, that I should actually have met you that unforgettable morning in the subway."

"I'm afraid we weren't introduced properly, dear," his wife answered. "Were we?"

"Well, you see, you didn't happen to have any brothers," said her husband, kissing her.

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### All the Difference.

The pessimist Fletcherizes his quinine pills. The optimist gets treed by a bear and enjoys the view.—Yale Record.

### An Alibi.

"How many times have I told you not to eat pie with a spoon?" asked Mrs. Cumrox.

"Not as many times as you think," replied her husband, humbly. "We don't have anything as plain as pie very often, you know."



### Solomon's Wisdom.

"Am I truly your affinity?" asked Solomon's latest wife.

"My dear, you're one in a thousand," answered the Wise One.

### Evading the Question.

Mistress—Are you a good cook?

Applicant—Yes'm. I go to church every Sunday.—Judge.